

PRAYER AND THE WORD OF GOD

1 John 5:14-15

Intro: It seems to be always true that not only are Christians interested in prayer, but they are interested in learning to pray effectively. We are very interested in having our prayers answered. While even people who do not know the Lord will say that they pray, and will express gratitude to others who say that they pray for them, especially in some crisis, yet only a true believer in Christ is capable to understanding what true prayer is.

When the Lord told Ananias where to find Saul of Tarsus, and how to identify him, He, the Lord, said, “Behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:11). Now when you realize that the Lord said this, it has to mean that for the first time in his life he was really praying. Before he had been a Pharisee, who, for a pretense, made long prayers, but now he was praying. See Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40. And it is the Apostle Paul who, more than any other in the NT, teaches us to pray, especially by telling us how he prayed.

True prayer is an expression that we are needy people whom only God can help. The Bible encourages us to pray continually, and to pray expecting that our prayers will be answered. But one of the many wonderful things about our text for this service is that, while it was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it expressed the deep confidence and strong conviction of this very godly and mature servant of the Lord, that God wants us to pray, that we should expect answers to our prayers, and how we should pray.

In this series I am directing your attention to various passages of Scripture which tell us what we *know*. We know what we know, if we understand the Apostle John properly, because they are revealed by God in His Word. We do not have superhuman knowledge ourselves, but we have a book in which God has revealed truths that we would not know in any other way. In verse 15 the Apostle John used the word “know” twice. (Read them.) But from verse 14 we see that what we need to be concerned about is that *God hears us!*

Now we know that God hears everything that anyone anywhere says. If He understands our thoughts afar off (Psa. 139:2), He certainly hears what we say. And David went on to say so in Psalm 139:4,

For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou

knowest it altogether (Psa. 139:4).

So that was not what the Apostle John was talking about. He meant that God hears true prayer with the purpose of answering it.

David addressed God in Psalm 65:2 as, “O Thou that hearest prayer.” There would be no such thing as prayer if God had not ordained it. It is in all men’s hearts that God hears and answers prayer. The problem is with some people that they are praying to the wrong god, just like it is with worship. There is a feeling in all men’s hearts that they need to worship God, but they are more inclined to worship the wrong god than they are the true God. That is one of the reasons that God has given us His Word, so we would know what true prayer is.

I think you could ask almost anyone to tell you what the most important condition for prayer is in this verse, they would respond by saying, *to know God’s will*. And they would be right. God never promised to answer any prayer about anything prayed by anybody, but here these verses are addressed, according to the verse immediately before them, to those “who believe on the Name of the Son of God.” God may in His infinite wisdom, and for His own glory, answer the prayer, or prayers of people who are not trusting in the Son of God for their salvation, but He does not promise that He will. But it is different with those of us who know the Lord, we are in a position to know God’s will, and so to pray according to His will. Why do I say that? Because we have the Bible, and we have the Holy Spirit to teach us from God’s Word what is involved in asking according to God’s will.

And so let me speak for a few minutes about:

I. OUR CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER.

What does it mean to ask according to God’s will? Remember now that we are speaking about true Christians, those who really are the children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thing that it means is:

A. Living according to God’s will.

The Apostle John said as much earlier in this same epistle. Look with me at 1 John 3:22. (Read.)

Now, when looking at any verse of Scripture, it is always wise to read the context, that is, the verses that and *with the text*, the verses which lead up to it, and the words that follow it.

So, having read the 22nd verse, let me go back to verse 21, and read through to the end of this chapter, 1 John 3. (Read 1 John 3:21-24.)

These words are very, very clear, aren't they? And the Apostle John actually helped us by telling us here what commandment we are to begin with. It is "that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."

If I understand this verse correctly this is what the Lord expressed as the first commandment in the Law, that is, in all of Scripture, when he was asked what was the first commandment in the Law. It was that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But you can't love God unless you love His Son. And you aren't loving His Son unless you believe in His Name. To believe in His Name is to acknowledge that He is the Son of God, that He died to save sinners from their sins, and to depend upon Him, and Him alone, for your eternal salvation.

So you can't ask according to the will of God unless you know Him through faith in His Son. You can't get anywhere near God unless you come to Him with Christ as your Savior. (Quote John 14:6.) Praying means coming to God, and you can't come to God unless and until the Lord Jesus is your Savior.

But once you know the Lord, then you understand that you need to live to please the Lord. Pleasing Him must be the primary objective in our lives, not only on Sunday, but also on Monday through Saturday. If you claim to be a Christian, but aren't interested in the Bible, reading it, and obeying it, then your claim is probably a false claim. On the other hand, a true Christian reads to learn, to learn about God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, but also how he is to live, what he is to be.

Think about our human relationships for a moment. If I am disobeying my parents, doing what they don't want me to do, is this the right time for me to ask them to grant some request that I would like for them to do. Sometimes, as we saw this morning in the life of Jacob, God blesses us when we are doing the wrong things, but that is the exception, not the rule that we need to be concerned about. Write this down in your heart: You

can't ask according to God's will if you are not living in His will. I can't be in fellowship with the Lord if I am out of fellowship with Lucille. And I really can't ask according to God's will if I am out of fellowship with you! And that is why the Apostle John added in 1 John 3:23, "and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

And the last verse of 1 John 3 tells us that all of this adds up to what it means to abide in God, and to have God abiding in us. This is what true fellowship is. And the outgrowth of true fellowship with God is answered prayer.

But let me mention another point in praying according to God's will. It is:

B. Praying according to God's Word.

You know that this is not the only verse in the Bible on prayer. We need to pay close attention to all that the Lord taught while He was here on earth concerning prayer. We need to read the prayers that are recorded for us in Scripture because every one of them is in the Bible to teach us how to pray. We had a wonderful example this morning in Jacob's prayer as he headed back to face a brother who had vowed that he was going to kill Jacob. What did we notice in that prayer? We noticed that Jacob was going home because the Lord told him to go home. We saw in that prayer that all of the pride and self-confidence that Jacob had manifest before, was gone, and Jacob humbled himself before the Lord. And then in his humility he confessed his utter dependence upon God. And he closed his prayer by telling the Lord that he was taking his stand on the Word of God.

Did God answer his prayer immediately? No! Did he feel a lot better after he prayed? It doesn't seem like he did. He was still afraid of what Esau might do? But did God answer His prayer? He certainly did in a most amazing way. What happened when they met? Jacob bowed seven times as he was approaching Esau, but then we read this:

And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept (Gen. 33:4).

And this leads me to the last point that I will make tonight.

C. Praying in the will of God means living "the time" and

the how” of the answer up to the Lord.

You see, when we tell the Lord when we want the answer, and what it shall be, we are praying, not according to His will, but according to our own will.

Most of the time we may not know what the will of God is. We need to be careful about claiming certain verses which may not even apply to us. Jacob knew because of God’s promise to him that the Lord was going to take care of him, but when and how, he did not know. We are building ourselves up for a disappointment if we begin telling the Lord when we want Him to do something, and what it is that we want Him to do. We can certainly express our desires to the Lord, but then it must be left to the Lord as to what He does, and when He is going to do it.

The promise given to us by the Holy Spirit through the Apostle John is that if we ask anything according to His will, God’s will, “we have the petition that we desired of Him.” It may be some time before the answer comes, but come it will, and just when the Lord wants us to have it.

Concl: I haven’t covered the whole subject of prayer tonight, perhaps just a small part, but certainly a basically important part. The word “ask” is in the present tense, which most of you know means *continuing to ask!*

And why does the Lord make us wait? There are several answers to that question, but one answer that is very important when you know what it is. That is that the Lord waits *to keep us coming.*

The Lord wants us to bring our needs to Him, but most of all He wants us to recognize that He is the One we need. And it is a major part of His will that we come, not just because we are in trouble, or because we have some need we want Him to meet, but because we love Him and love to be with Him..